

TWO PICTURES.

BY HELEN FAIRBAIN.

This was the first opportunity which had presented itself of gaining an introduction to the goddess at whose feet he had cast fragrant offerings, and he made haste to avail himself of it. With a gracious smile, Mrs. Bertram granted compliance with his earnest request, and presently the doctor found himself *l'ête-à-l'ête* with Miss Gordon. The young lady contemplatively pulled the forefinger of her light tan glove half off, and rubbed it on again. Truth to tell, she hardly knew how to "take" this new acquaintance, being just a little bit shy of him on account of his literary reputation. And he? He was overpowered for the moment by this delightful nearness to the fair girl, for a glimpse of whom he had often gone blocks out of his way. But his wits did not desert him entirely. April weather afforded a beginning, and from that they drifted to other topics. Presently, with a perfectly unembarrassed candour peculiar to her, she told him that she was a little afraid of anyone "so clever" as he was. The doctor smilingly deprecated, and she continued in the same vein, expressing a naive wonder as to where he got his "beautiful thoughts." She had not only read his published verses then, but had actually thought of them; cared something for them! It was intoxicating to the poet and the man—so much so that he found himself telling her of his secret hopes and ambitions, of how small, how desperately small, his successes seemed in view of what he craved for; and she listened, looking at him now and then, her great blue eyes full of childlike innocence and intelligent sympathy, with an occasional appreciative interjection.

In the midst of this, to Keith Clarendon, almost sacred conversation, some one came to take her away from him. It was too bad, but the edge was taken off by the fact that she seemed not pleased at the interruption. For some time he watched her laughing and talking with other people, and experienced a slight chill on observing that her demeanour towards them was every whit as kind and sympathetic as it had been to him.

"I'm afraid I'm falling in love with her," he said to himself, "and I don't believe I've struck even the chord of friendship in her heart."

Once when in her vicinity he overheard a young lady exclaim:

"Oh! Edna, this is your birthday! Many happy returns!"

Not long after this, having unfitted himself for bandying conventional commonplaces by his conversation with Miss Gordon, he excused himself to Mrs. Bertram for such a short stay, and made his way out. Before going home, he paid another visit to the florist, which resulted in the purchase of an exquisite bouquet, upon which the young doctor felt an undeniable pleasure in expending three dollars. The usual bit of pasteboard, this time bearing the words "Many happy returns of May 1st!" accompanied it, causing the fair recipient to knit her brows in hopeless wonderment as to the identity of this mysterious unknown friend, who even knew the date of her birthday.

Ten o'clock that night found Keith Clarendon alone in his study, luxuriating in the depths of his most comfortable arm chair, a volume in his hand. He thought he was reading Emerson; he had thought so for the last half hour. Presently he became aware of the deception he was practising upon himself, and, taking careful aim, lodged the venerable volume on a sofa on the opposite side of the room.

"Now then," he soliloquized, "let a man be honest with himself and day-dream outright, without holding up an old philosopher for a screen!"

The clock ticked away seven minutes in silence, otherwise unbroken, then a sudden sharp ring at the door-bell struck across the quiet with its imperative turbulence. After the first jarred evulsion of feeling, the physician's instinct awoke, and when, within a few moments, the servant showed a young man into the study, the doctor was alert and interested. The youth, who wore a bulky red muffler, which enveloped his neck and reappeared at the terminus of his thick pea jacket, stated as the cause of his late call that Miss Ruth Carroll was very ill and wished to see Dr. Clarendon. Would he come at once?

"Miss Ruth Carroll!" the doctor repeated—half inquiringly, half ruminatingly—as he put himself into his overcoat. The youth volunteered a response.

"She said as how you did up her forehead for her last winter."

"Oh! yes; yes. I remember very well. Is she very low, do you know?"

"Can't get better, sir. Doctor says she won't live a day more, and she said as how she'd like to see you before she goes, if you'd come."

For answer, Clarendon lowered the gas and strode from the room, followed closely by the young man. A smart walk brought them to their destination—a little street, a *cul de sac*, off Bleury, where they sought admittance to a high brick house, of somewhat grimy exterior. At the top of the second flight of stairs they encountered the presiding genius of the house, who proved to be the mother of the young man with the red muffler.

After repeating in substance what her son had told Dr. Clarendon, she conducted the latter into a little room near at hand, where the dying girl lay. He bent over her and took one frail hand in his. She smiled faintly, saying:

"I am so glad you came."

"I wish I had known you were ill, and I should have come to you long ago," he rejoined.

"I have never been well since the beginning of the year. The last time I was at your office it was so slippery on the streets; there was ice everywhere. On the road home I fell and strained myself some way. I have been failing ever since. Mrs. Baird brought her doctor to see me, and he told me. I felt sure of it anyway. I'm going home."

Keith Clarendon gave the thin hand he held a sudden, fierce pressure, and looked away for a few moments.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he said, presently. "Anything you want done, or anybody you would like to see?"

"No; I have no friend to send for now that you are here." Clarendon winced at the words. "And I have nothing to leave, save my trunk and a very few clothes, and more than that is due to Mrs. Baird for all she has done. Here are your books," she continued, touching caressingly the volumes that lay beside her. "No one knows what they have been to me. I have read and re-read them—" Her voice sailed.

The doctor groaned audibly. "And I with shelves of books—" he began, and broke off abruptly.

"You will take them again," she continued. "I have given my Bible to Sam Baird. Mr. Fielding, a clergyman, was here this afternoon. He is coming again to-night. After a moment's pause, 'I am so glad you are here,' she said, putting her other thin hand over Clarendon's strong, warm fingers. With a swift, passionate gesture, the doctor sank on his knees and bowed his head, and the girl felt his hot tears on her hand. For a few moments there was silence, broken only by the laboured breathing of the young man as he struggled to master his emotion, and the quick, fitful respiration of the dying girl. Presently, without raising his face, he said in low, broken tones:

"Oh! my child; why did I do nothing for you when I could!"

"What more could you have done? You know you could not easily have been a friend to me," she said simply. "There are reasons, and reasons."

Yes, he knew it too well. He knew the thousand and one difficulties that would always lie in the way of a young man—cultured and well-to-do—befriending a poor, wage-earning orphan; and he mentally cursed the trammels and conventionalities of society in his bitterness, even while acknowledging that such befriending might only end in greater desolateness for its object. Musing sadly thus, he observed the sick girl move restlessly upon her pillow. Rising from his knees, he seated himself upon the bed, and drawing her woollen shawl about her, raised her in his arms. She acquiesced meekly, and seemed restfully content as her head leaned on his shoulder. Presently he spoke:

"You are not afraid. You are not alone?"

A quick smile glorified the white face. "Oh, no. I am not alone, for Christ is with me. I am going home to Him."

A low rap at the door was followed by the entrance of Mrs. Baird and Mr. Fielding. Clarendon did not change his position; he felt a strange right to be there. The clergyman knelt and prayed. Mrs. Baird knelt also, sobbing audibly in the folds of her voluminous hankchief. After the solemn *Amen*, the minister raised his eyes, and noting a warning change on the pallid face, he repeated:

"Let not your heart be troubled. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself. That where I am, there ye may be also."

The dying girl drew a deep breath. "Do you remember," she said to Clarendon, speaking with some difficulty, "you told me once you trusted there was a happy life before me? It is before me—now—and so near—oh, my friend, my friend," she dwelt lovingly on the sweet word, "so near. A happy life!"

Keith pressed his lips to her forehead. Once more he heard the words—"A happy life!"—and then there was a great calm. Mrs. Baird's sobbing grew into stifled shrieks, the clergyman's eyes filled with tears, and Dr. Clarendon knew that all was over.

The faint greyiness of the May morning was stirring in the chilly night air when the young doctor made his way homeward through the lonely streets. Suddenly, a memory of the previous afternoon floated vaguely through his mind, and he wondered if it was but a few hours since he had laughed and talked in Dr. Bertram's brilliant, crowded rooms. A few hours! It was years; it was another world.

Two weeks later the Montreal *Gazette* contained the following:—"Dr. Keith Clarendon leaves by C.P.R. train to-night for Vancouver on a voyage round the world. His many friends wish him a pleasant trip and safe return. We understand the doctor will contribute articles descriptive of his travels to several newspapers. These will doubtless be well worth reading, as Dr. Clarendon's ability to handle a pen is a well established fact."

IV.

Twice had the smiles of spring deepened into the laughter of summer, the still content of autumn, and the glistening quiet of winter. December had entered the lists valiantly—white with frost, armed with icicles, and whirled along in a drifting cloud of snow. One flurry of starry flakes after another had covered the ground, and when one day the soft grey clouds finally withdrew and old Sol

reigned once more in the clear Canadian sky, everything was beautifully, softly, dazzlingly white. Early in the afternoon of this glorious, winter day, two ladies met on Dorchester Street West, and paused for a brief confabulation. As they talked, a stalwart, handsome man emerged from the gateway of a residence near at hand and walked past them.

"Do you know who that is?" exclaimed one of the ladies with the air of a person who has an interesting communication to make.

"No; I do not."

"It's Dr. Clarendon, my dear; come back to wear his laurels in his native land."

"Is that Dr. Clarendon—the Keith Clarendon who wrote 'A Happy Life'?"

"The very one. They say he's made quite a little fortune, as well as a name, by it. You know he went abroad about a year and a half ago, and wrote it while away. Had it published in London."

"Well, there will be ado enough about him here now, you may be sure. Enough to spoil the young man."

"He isn't made of the sort of stuff that spoils," replied her companion with conviction. "He knows far too much to be vain."

In the meantime the young doctor's long strides were taking him rapidly eastward.

In appearance he was much the same man as two years previously, save that the expression of his face had undergone that inexplicable change, easy to observe, but hard to locate. The look that told of hope and expectancy had deepened into the expression of remembrance and thoughtfulness. Coming near St. Paul's Church, Clarendon observed lines of sleighs on either side of the road, and groups of people at the church doors and on the footpath.

"A wedding, I suppose," he soliloquized, and paused in front of the church, hearing the faint strains of the wedding march from within.

"They are coming now!" said some one near the door, and the word was passed on through the crowd, which ranged itself closely on either side of the red spread from the door to the stately covered sleigh, whose sleek bay horses tossed their proud heads, fluttering the white ribbon rosettes at their ears.

The doctor took a place amongst the others to see the bride pass out. Presently the excitement ran higher, there was a forward pressure of the packed lines of people, the triumphant strains of the wedding march floated out with clearness, as the church doors went back, and down the carpeted steps came a vision of cloudy tulle, white velvet and orange blossoms.

Clarendon felt a strange thrill, a sudden mental commotion, as he saw Edna Gordon, the jewel in all this fair setting. In the few moments that they were within view, he took in the fact that the bridegroom was a man of noble presence, and that the fair girl leaning on his arm in her snowy raiment was bewilderingly lovely, beyond what he had ever seen her before. Then the young pair were shut into the sleigh, the coachman flourished his be-ribboned whip, the bay horses pranced forward, and a bevy of fluttering, pink and blue bridesmaids were the cynosure of all eyes—of all save Keith Clarendon's; he was looking after the sleigh as it rolled away westward.

"Who is he? Who's the bridegroom?" queried a voice behind the doctor. It was one girl asking of another the question which had already formulated itself in his mind. He listened keenly for the response.

"Don't you know? Do you mean to say you didn't hear of the engagement? I thought every one in town knew about it. Why, he's Sir Philip Stanhope, an English baronet, and tremendously rich. Edna Gordon's beauty didn't go for nothing."

For a moment the doctor felt a strong desire to confront the garrulous young lady who was rattling about the *trousseau* and kindred matters, and tell her that Edna Gordon's mind and heart were as beautiful as her sweet face, and that for his part he thought Sir Philip had done excellently well. Then he smiled, and detaching himself from the crowd, hurried to his office. One half hour later a messenger left a parcel at the door of the Gordons' residence. A square white card attached to it bore the inscription "Lady Stanhope," and in the lower right hand corner "A Friend."

The lovely bride gave a little cry as it was placed in her hands. "Look, Phil!" she said, turning to her husband, "it's from the 'Unknown'."

With trembling fingers she removed the wrappers and cover, and lifted from the box an exquisite gold necklet. "I fancy your 'Unknown' has been abroad," said the baronet as he took the necklet and examined it critically, "that is of East Indian workmanship and a very beautiful specimen." Then in an undertone to his bride, "He's a rarely generous fellow, who ever he may be, to send you such a lovely present now when I've got you!"

Christmas Eve once more. Dr. Clarendon's valise is lying packed and ready for his homeward trip. Just now he is sitting in his study chair, regarding with an amused smile the energetic gestures of the French lawyer, Lemesurier, who sits opposite to him, and who is discoursing vigorously on the advantages of married life, upon which, by the way, he proposes entering shortly.

"You take my word for it, Clarendon," he says, punctuating his remarks with waggings of his forefinger, "it's the best thing a man can do. You'll find it out some day and follow my example—surely," the last word delivered with the emphasis of conviction.